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Next streetcar routes to Bronzeville, 3rd Ward, Walker's Point could be running by 2021

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Milwaukee officials are seeking money for a planned north-south Milwaukee streetcar line to extend the system into Bronzeville north of the downtown, and into the 3rd Ward and Walker's Point, as early as 2021.

City officials over the past month highlighted those routes as the next legs of the downtown streetcar system, but on Thursday provided details on how quickly they could move forward. In response to critics who say the streetcar only serves downtown, Milwaukee Mayor [Tom Barrett](#) has pledged extensions to get the transit system into surrounding neighborhoods.

The proposed 3.5-mile north-south extension would start that effort.

"We don't get to Greenfield Avenue without adding onto the system," Milwaukee development commissioner [Rocky Marcoux](#) said Thursday. "We don't get to North Avenue without adding onto the system incrementally."

The city currently has money to build a 2.5-mile streetcar system through the heart of downtown, into the lower east side and to the downtown lakefront. The downtown and lakefront lines would open in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

A proposed extension would take the system north along Fourth Street to Highland Avenue. That could open for service in 2020 if the city can secure a \$20 million federal grant. Milwaukee's Redevelopment Authority on Thursday [gave the first endorsement to a \\$20 million city financing package](#) for that 0.75-mile Fourth Street extension.

Efforts are already underway for the next legs heading north and south. Marcoux's department last week applied for a \$750,000 federal grant to study the north-south extension. The northern leg would extend the Fourth Street line past the Park East corridor, onto Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive and up to Bronzeville at North Avenue.

An extension to the south could run through the busy 3rd Ward on Milwaukee Street, over the river and into the rapidly developing Walker's Point area. If the city can round up funding, those legs could be built concurrently, said city engineer [Jeff Polenske](#).

"We don't necessarily have a specific roadway defined at this point in time for each of those connections," Polenske said. "But as part of the study we'll be looking at economic development potential within those corridors, as well as looking at how do we best make those connections."

The \$750,000 federal grant application would search for opportunities to have new developments crop up around the north-south extensions. The city would partner with groups including the King Drive Business Improvement District and Harbor District Inc. on that planning effort. It could lead to marketing efforts for properties along the route.

The planning will recommend zoning, search for opportunities for affordable housing and preserving historic buildings, said [Dan Casanova](#) of the Milwaukee Department of City Development.

"That will enable us to get out into those neighborhoods and start talking about how and where the streetcar should be going in those areas," Casanova said.

That federal grant program will announce its awards in fall.

Conceptually, the city could firm up final designs for the north-south route between 2017 and 2019, begin building it in 2020 and open it for service in 2021.

"If the grant were awarded, it certainly would give us the ability to move forward in that timeline," Polenske said.

The city also will seek to join the federal Small Starts funding program, which finances rail and transit projects valued at less than \$250 million, Polenske said. Milwaukee County this year plans to seek funding through that same competitive program to pay for 80 percent of the construction cost for a proposed bus rapid transit line.



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The north-south extension would run the streetcars south of St. Paul Avenue and into the 3rd Ward.

Sean Ryan
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Milwaukee Business Journal

